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TEXTILE ARTS AS SOCIAL OCCUPATIONS

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The study of textiles in the school is to be considered not merely as a form of manual-training, but as a fundamental social occupation. Spinning, dyeing, weaving, and needle-work give children opportunity for creative work in these arts and make them intelligent co-operatives in the clothing activities of society.

That the textile arts may be truly *social* occupations, it is first of all essential that all enterprises engaged in shall be social in their nature; that is, that the result desired, the work completed, shall have a definite social use, shall fill a need of the community in which it is made. Nor is it sufficient that such need exists. It is a necessary condition of truly socialized work that the workman himself clearly perceive this need and willingly co-operate in filling it. The acts of weaving paper mats, tying intricate knots in strings, and the sewing of models for a sample-book may all be very interesting in themselves, and no doubt develop a degree of skill in children. These are not, however, *social* acts unless every article made has a definite use, æsthetic or utilitarian—a use which has been so apparent to the children that it has stimulated them to enthusiastic effort.

Another condition of socialized work is that it shall benefit, not only the community, but also the worker himself, and it is primarily the function of the teacher as a social organizer so to plan community work as to make it of greatest value to the individual child. Much of the hand-work in schools has been planned upon the idea that *all work is education*, whereas it should, of course, be logically based upon principles which will make it of the highest possible value. Such principles have been promulgated by the leaders in education and have been recognized by students, but few of them are in operation in our school-rooms. The teacher who stands as guardian of a child's best good must

recognize the fact that character-building is his function, and that this can come about only through properly organized community life.

The primal condition of right community life is that it should afford opportunity for and encouragement of voluntary individual service. The second is that the service performed shall be such as to react upon the individual offering the service to his best growth. To keep the knowledge of this scheme entirely outside the consciousness of the children; to order the affairs of the schoolroom in such a way as to bring about spontaneous, intelligent, and educative co-operation, is the work of the teacher.

The textile arts cannot fulfil their function in the educational scheme, therefore, unless they take their place in the community life in their proper order and under right social laws. As has been already pointed out, they must propose only such articles for making as can be used—articles for which the children see the need, and which they care to make. They must afford opportunity for the children's initiative, choice of material, taste in color, originality in design; in other words, that they may offer the highest development to the maker, they must give him the fullest chance for self-expression. Further than this, all textile materials and processes used must bring the users into close contact with the geographical and industrial sources from which they come; must lead him to large information regarding the origins and meanings of the things he is making and the materials he is using. It is therefore plain that the study in school includes more than the making of a series of objects. A most important part of the subject is the science, history, geography, and literature which interprets it and makes it applicable to life.

The course of study in textiles for the elementary department of the School of Education is an attempt toward socializing a part of the children's effort in school. Changing from year to year, to fit the changing conditions of the school society, a mere enumeration of the articles made conveys little meaning to a reader. But it is not possible within the space of this paper to indicate either process or much of the correlation with other subjects.

Following is an outline of work done throughout the different groups of the school, and later numbers of the magazine will give detailed descriptions and illustrations of the results.

Mats, rugs, carpets, and curtains are woven or stenciled by children of the first grade for their playhouses, and used in their own games or in the games of the children to whom they are given. The designing of them sets the children to work on the problems of color, light and dark, proportions, and lines. The cotton, wool, linens, and silks used are studied as the materials of clothing. Specimens of each are mounted with pictures of sources and processes, and all are labeled in written words and sentences learned for the purpose. As a means of awakening the minds of the children to the general subject of clothing, a series of lessons is planned upon the clothing of animals, the function of coverings and their adaptation to environment.

In the second and third grades mats and baskets are made for picnics and luncheons, from primitive materials gathered in the home locality. In the making of these greatest encouragement is given to originality and invention. To facilitate processes of weaving, looms are invented, and spindles are made; wool and linen fibers are twisted into thread and dyed by means of any vegetable or mineral suggested by the children. With the discovery and invention of primitive methods in spinning and weaving the children are given lessons upon the clothing processes of such primitive peoples as the cave-men, the North American Indians, the lake-dwellers of ancient Switzerland, and the Eskimos; also the shepherds of Arabia and of ancient peoples; later of the Norsemen and ancient Greeks. Numbers, weights, measures, and arithmetical processes are taught in the use of dyeing and weaving materials.

Baskets and mats are woven of rattan and raffia; rugs of jute; slipper bags are worked in original cross-stitch designs with heavy linen floss in coarse canvas.

In the fourth grade one quarter's work is given to sewing—selection and buying of material, use of scissors, design and cutting of a pattern, basting, running, French seam, hemming, blanket-stitch, feather-stitch, and joining of tape all come into

this problem. Several members of the class begin the use of machines in stitching the larger seams. Special study is made of cotton from specimens of plant fibers, and fabrics; also from pictures and printed descriptions.

The children of the fifth grade design a small pocket or belt, and weave it on a hand-frame invented and made by them from the knowledge gained from their second- and third-year's experiences. After this they design and execute in cross-stitch one article for household use—e. g., a pillow, table-cover, or bureau-scarf. Sewing is carried one step farther in the making of curtains, aprons, or some simple article needed in the school. Weaving progresses to the point of making a rag-rug. The materials used are dyed by the children with natural dyes. A special study is made of flax, silk, and wool fibers. The history of the early American colonists and of the textile arts of their homes accompanies this work, also a study of the spinning-wheel and the colonial loom.

In the sixth grade one quarter's work, two hours each week, is devoted to the designing of one decorative piece of household furnishing—a pillow, scarf, curtain, what the individual children choose—to be executed in stencil, appliqué, or simple embroidery. With this should be read or told stories of mediæval tapestry-working, and ancient embroideries, as part of the history and geography of the Middle Ages. Some mechanical drawing is needed in this design; dyeing is continued.

The girls of the seventh and eighth grades sew on muslin garments. Both boys and girls do some weaving in the Swedish loom in the making of scarfs and squares of simple design; both design and carve wooden blocks for block-printing; both study clothing and the clothing industries of their own town. They have industrial excursions, and learn the history of their own clothing as nearly as possible from original sources. They learn the history of special fabrics, light calicoes and cretonnes, for example; the routes of transportation for clothing fibers and fabrics, and something of the business forms involved in their manufacture and sale. The history of textile machinery, and a little of the story of the origin of the factory system, should

also be part of this study of clothing. Besides the making of clothing, laboratory experiments give information in regard to the proper care of fabrics—that is, as to washing, cleansing, dyeing, and fading. Samples are studied, combined, and discussed. High standards of taste in dress are discussed and used as subjects for papers. Costumes are planned in a practical way, with some regard to prices as well as to taste and suitability.

The aim of this work is, first, to give children experience in all possible clothing processes, in order that they may become actually intelligent in regard to them; secondly, to give them an appreciation of the meaning of clothing from the scientific, artistic, industrial, and historic standpoints; thirdly, and most important, to make them willing and skilful co-operators in the work of the community.